

South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority

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Testimony to the Environment Committee**Committee Bill 5526, An Act Concerning Commercial or Residential Projects on Property that Contains Certain Woodlands**

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The South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority (SCCRWA) is a non-profit, public corporation and political subdivision of the State. Our mission is to provide our customers with high quality water at a reasonable cost while promoting the preservation of watershed land and aquifers. We provide approximately 51 million gallons of water per day to an estimated 430,000 consumers in our region. The source of this water is a system of watershed and aquifer areas that cover about 120 square miles within 24 municipalities. More than 27,000 acres of these watershed and aquifer areas are protected as open space as a result of the Authority's efforts and efforts with partners. Within the 20 member towns of our water district, we own and operate a public water system, which includes 10 active reservoirs, 4 surface water treatment plants and 7 ground water treatment plants.

The SCCRWA opposes Committee Bill 5526, An Act Concerning Commercial or Residential Projects on Property that Contains Certain Woodlands. The bill would require an additional layer of state regulation beyond any current local, state, or federal approval requirements for projects taking place on woodland properties exceeding 200 acres. This is without regard to the nature or size of the proposed activity.

The land we own and manage for public water supply uses includes large tracts of undeveloped forest lands. These lands are managed by the SCCRWA for watershed protection, timber resource conservation, wildlife resource protection, open space preservation, and education and research. However, construction projects on these large tracts of land have and will continue to occur as necessary, including access roads, pumping and water distribution facilities, treatment plants, dams, and other improvements.

The approval process to implement these projects generally requires the scrutiny and approval of multiple agencies including municipal planning and zoning commissions, inland wetlands commissions, the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, the Connecticut Department of Public Health, and the United States Army Corp of Engineers. This bill as proposed would add an additional level of review, expense, and uncertainty to advance objectives that are currently already the focus of existing regulatory permit programs. Further, we believe HB5526 would pose additional expense and potentially staffing needs for Department of Environmental Protection at a time when they have already admitted they are overextended.

The SCCRWA appreciates and promotes the preservation of woodlands as essential to the protection of public water supplies. However, this proposed bill unfairly penalizes landowners solely based on acreage rather than the potential impact of proposed construction activities, while creating a redundant and unnecessary additional layer of bureaucracy in the land use permitting process.